Employing an Armor QRF in the Area Defense:

"Area defense is a type of defensive operation that concentrates on denying enemy forces access to designated terrain for a specific time rather than destroying the enemy outright. The bulk of defending forces combine static defensive positions, engagement areas, and a small, mobile reserve to block enemy forces. The reserve has a priority to the counterattack...but may also perform limited security force missions."

U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0

by Major William J. VandenBergh

As the United States' participation in the Second World War loomed in 1941, much of America's early fighting strength came from the Army National Guard. The 194th Tank Battalion had been organized from three National Guard tank companies, Company A from Brainerd, Minnesota; Company B from Saint Joseph, Missouri; and Company C from Salinas, California. The 194th Tank Battalion had deployed to the Philippines during the fall of 1941 in support of its defense from a possible Japanese attack.

The American defensive plan had been set for several years. The task of the Philippine and U.S. Army ultimately would be to defend Manila Bay with the purpose of denying the Japanese its use, and to allow for reinforcement from the Territory of Hawaii.² Manila Bay could only be denied to the Japanese by occupying the Bataan Peninsula and the Island of Corregidor,

which guarded the harbor.³ Retention of the Bataan Peninsula was the center of gravity for the entire Luzon Defensive Campaign. The plan was to defend for up to 6 months, until relieved by the U.S. Pacific Fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor.

Initial Japanese landings on Luzon occurred between 9 and 10 December 1941.⁴ Unable to introduce combat power against these remote sites and unwilling to divide forces, U.S. forces could do nothing but wait for Japanese troops to arrive.

The 194th Tank Battalion was commanded by Lieutenant Colonel (LTC) Ernest B. Miller and was comprised of M3 tanks, half-tracks, jeeps, and motorcycles. For nearly a month, the 194th Tank Battalion had fought along a series of phase, obstacle, and holding lines, executing a retrograde delay from both North and South Luzon. It had fought a number of sharp actions and contributed significantly to the success of the orderly delay of American and Filipino forces back to the Bataan Peninsula. (Map 1)



The 194thTank Battalion in action during the Luzon Defensive Campaign 1941-42

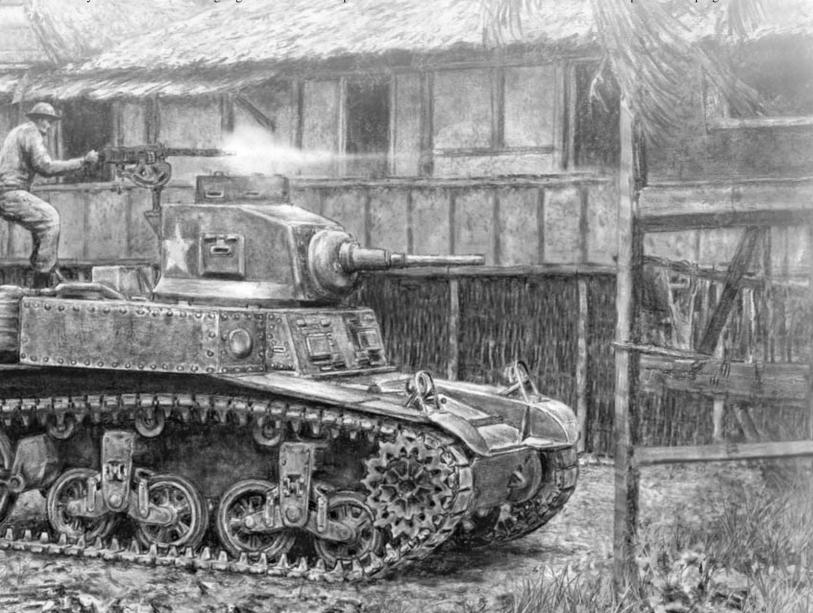
The peninsula of Bataan is 20 miles wide and 25 miles long. Its existence is owed to two large extinct volcanoes, Mount Natib in the north and Mount Bataan in the south. They tower 4,222 and 4,722 feet respectively.⁵ From the volcanoes, scores of streams race through the jungle down deep ravines. The jungle cover is so thick that Japanese reconnaissance from the air was nearly impossible. Bataan had numerous trails that, with lack of use, quickly grew over and road systems were few and undeveloped.⁶ In the north, traveling from west to east was Highway 7. In the east, Highway 110 began far to the north and followed the coast south, then west and north to Moron. The west side of Highway 110 was designated as West Road, the east side as East Road. In the center of the Bataan Peninsula was the Pilar-Bagac Road. It cut directly across the center, providing the only lateral route.7 The final defensive battles occurred on the Bataan Peninsula. The first line was known as the Abucay-Hacienda Line.8 (Map 2) Along this defensive line were two higher headquarters, I and II Corps. I Corps had been the North Luzon Force and II Corps was the former South Luzon Force. The 194th Tank Battalion was allocated to II Corps in the east. The II Corps front was 15,000 meters long from Manila Bay to Mount Natib.9

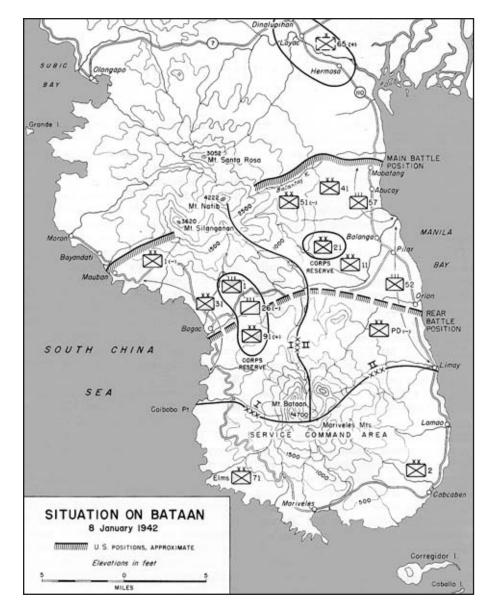
By 10 January, the 194th Tank Battalion was well rested and ready for action. The morning began with the main Japanese at-

tack within II Corps' area of operation (AO) near Abucay. Here, the 194th Tank Battalion moved forward to support the 57th Infantry (PS). The 57th Infantry was opposed by the Japanese 1st and 2d Battalion, 142d Infantry, 65th Brigade. ¹⁰

As the battalion fulfilled its mission, Miller received a desperate early morning call. The Japanese had attacked in the I Corps and made a deep incursion. Captain Fred C. Moffitt and his Company C was sent into action. Lieutenant General (LTG) Jonathan M. Wainwright met Moffitt personally. Wainwright directed the company to attack north along a small trail. The Japanese 3d Battalion, 20th Infantry had successfully infiltrated south from Mount Silanganan using the deep gullies and streams to mask their movement. Now they established defensive positions just to the north.¹¹

Wainwright's plan had the scouts (dismounted for the attack) from the 26th Cavalry clear the route ahead of time but no infantry was available to support the tank movement. Moffitt quickly identified the need for a leader's reconnaissance and additional infantry support to walk next to the tanks to deny the Japanese the ability to ambush them or employ the deadly model 93 antitank mines. Wainwright grew impatient and Moffitt was ordered to proceed. In short order, the lead platoon left its attack position and moved in column forward. The platoon had progressed





only a short way when Moffitt heard an explosion. The two lead tanks had hit a minefield. As the company evacuated the two tanks, Japanese infantrymen crawled away and made good their exfiltration. From concealed positions, the Japanese fired their lightweight model 11, 37mm guns. Because of the thick vegetation, both sides had difficulty targeting. With some difficulty, the remaining tanks provided cover fire, as the two lead tanks were evacuated. 12

Moffitt's executive officer sent back a contact report to Miller who reciprocated by draining the battalion's maintenance section of its last track links and idlers. Wainwright finally accepted the need for more infantry and moved forward the 3rd Battalion, 72nd Infantry, along with a motorized squadron from the 26th Cavalry. From there, the American infantry reformed the line correctly and advanced north, checking the Japanese incursion and restoring their previous positions.

Later that evening, Brigadier General (BG) James R. N. Weaver, commander, 1st Provisional Tank Group, called a commander's huddle with both the 192d and 194th Tank Battalion commanders. The main body of front line troops would exfiltrate rearward that night leaving behind a small covering force. By 0300 hours the next morning, the covering force would also withdraw to positions north of the Orion-Bagac line near the town of

Map 1.

The Fall of the Philippines — United States Army in World War II, Louis Morton, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., p. 246.

Pilar. Here, the covering force would continue its mission, allowing the main body time to re-establish a coherent defense. Miller was pleased with the plan and was impressed with the learning that had occurred at the higher level.¹⁴

By 1800 hours, the withdrawal was underway. The undertrained Filipino troops attempted an orderly movement, but it quickly degenerated into a mob movement. Miller and a number of trained Filipino soldiers attempted to instill discipline, but the task was difficult. By 1900 hours, the Japanese sensed these movements and their attack began.

The II Corps' line in this sector was comprised of the 31st and 45th Infantry Regiments.¹⁵ The 31st and 45th Infantry covering forces fought savagely through the night, but by 0100 hours, it became apparent that their combat power was rapidly dwindling. Their successful withdrawal to new positions within a few hours and stabilizing the line over the next two-and-a-half days of fighting would determine whether the new defensive line would hold.¹⁶

As the 194th Tank Battalion provided the covering force for the 31st and 45th Infantry, Miller took some desperate radio traffic from Weaver. The left flank of II Corps was threatened with collapse and additional combat power was need-

ed. Moving slowly west along a small trail, the tanks and half-tracks approached their positions. It was during this movement that one of Company A's tanks, commanded by Sergeant Bernie FitzPatrick, ran partly off the side of a bridge and became stuck. With little time to effect a recovery, Miller ordered it destroyed. A single 37mm round from another M3 set the tank on fire. It was quickly pushed into the stream. The move had to be made before the moon rose, but this aided in their concealment. The tanks and half-tracks were set into position and opened fire. A deadly massing of 37mm fire from the M3s and 75mm fire from the half-tracks stopped the Japanese attack cold. The infantry covering force withdrew and mounted buses that took them to safety. By 0300 hours, the operation was complete. 18

By 26 January, the 194th Tank Battalion was positioned just south of the Orion-Bagac defensive line.¹⁹ (Map 3) It was arrayed from north to south, along Back Road. As 1030 hours approached, several half-tracks, performing their security mission, sighted a Japanese officer and soldier as they crawled out of the jungle and walked to the south toward the intersection of the Back and Banibani Roads. Private Nordstrom manned the half-track's .30-caliber machine gun. A well-placed burst of his .30-caliber machine gun tore the two apart. Within a matter of minutes, the entire defensive line opened fire and a new battle

began. The half-tracks replied by opening fire with their 75mm guns.

Prior to the battle, the gunners had identified several gullies and pieces of low ground that provided concealed and covered infiltration routes. As the battle began, the 75mm guns poured their fire into the gullies with devastating effect. As the Japanese made it out of the smoke, dazed and suffering from the concussions, they were greeted with machine gun fire that succeeded in killing many of the survivors. Action was hot all along the road. From the north to the south, the battalion replied to the attack with deadly fire. Several times their positions were almost overrun, defended only by the 194th Tank Battalion support troops manning Thompson submachine guns and .45-caliber pistols.²¹

By 1130 hours, the Japanese artillery and mortar fire was zeroing in on the battalion's position.²² At 1200 hours, Miller was forced to order a retreat behind the main line of resistance. The battalion's withdrawal was met by a determined Japanese air attack on the convoy.²³ The .50- and .30-caliber machine guns

that were mounted on tanks and half-tracks met the attack the best they could. Accuracy for both the Japanese and the Americans was difficult, as the tanks and half-tracks were moving down the dirt road so quickly that the gunners and enemy pilots had great difficulty seeing through the dust.²⁴

Weaver was quick to issue the 192d and 194th Tank Battalions a fragmentary order. The 194th Tank Battalion was to continue to provide an armor reserve for II Corps, while it gained an on-order mission to defend the beaches from the front line in the north to the town of Cabcaben in the south. Miller was frustrated with the command arrangement, as Weaver directed him to take orders only from Tank Group Headquarters rather than a more simplified chain of command directly from II Corps Headquarters. To facilitate better liaison, Miller complied with the orders but sent his reconnaissance platoon leader, Lieutenant Ted Spaulding, to Corps Headquarters as the battalion's liaison of-

General Masaharu Homma, commander of Japanese forces in the Philippines, met with his 14th Army staff on 8 February. All attempts at reducing the American position had failed miserably. Now, with his attack force spent, he looked at new options for victory. The original Japanese plan had contemplated an order of battle that included the elite 48th Division attacking at Linagayen Gulf, the 16th Division at Lamon Bay, and reinforcement at Linagayen by the 65th Brigade. The campaign would last 50 days at most.

As early as January, Homma had received word from the Southern Army that the 48th Division was to be withdrawn to support operations in Java. The fight for Bataan began with only the 16th Division, the 7th Tank Regiment, and the 65th Brigade. Neither unit had a very good

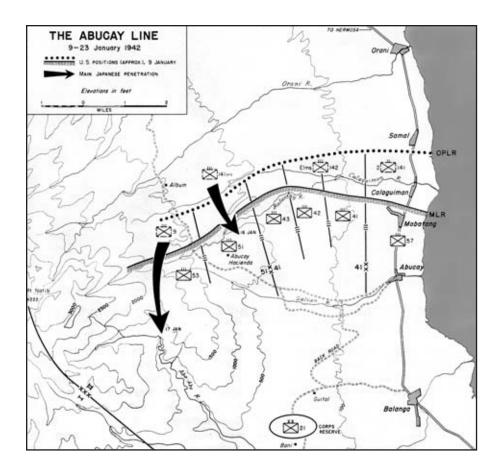
reputation after the first battles for Bataan.²⁸ Homma was overwhelmed by a sense of private and international humiliation. Here, for the first time during World War II, the Japanese had been stopped cold in their tracks with no hope for victory without reinforcement.

Meanwhile, significant work was completed in the preparation of the Pilar-Bagac line.²⁹ Fighting positions with overhead cover were built. Mines were laid to cover dead space that rifle fire could not cover. Time was found to further train the remaining Filipino troops and Miller ordered classes for the tankers on how to support the infantry.³⁰

The morale of the troops was very high. The Japanese had been fought to an utter standstill. Desertions and discharges on the part of the Philippine Army had helped to reduce the unmanageable size of the force on Bataan. Combat effectiveness had increased markedly as combat experience weeded out the weak and brought forward the soldiers with leadership potential.



"Prior to the battle, the gunners had identified several gullies and pieces of low ground that provided concealed and covered infiltration routes. As the battle began, the 75mm guns poured their fire into the gullies with devastating effect. As the Japanese made it out of the smoke, dazed and suffering from the concussions, they were greeted with machine gun fire that succeeded in killing many of the survivors."



It was during this time that the II Corps G2 section detected a massive build up of Japanese forces. The Japanese 4th Division had arrived from Shanghai. The 21st Regiment (part of the 21st Division) had been diverted in route to Indo-China. Finally, several thousand replacements arrived to revitalize the 16th Division and the 65th Brigade.³¹ Japanese air attacks became progressively larger reaching a total of 77 bomber sorties in just one day. The Japanese set up artillery across Manila Bay and fired accurately with the help of highflying aerial observers.³²

As the tankers dug in, dengue fever, malaria, diarrhea, and dysentery afflicted many of the soldiers. Men became prone to dizziness as black spots raced across their view. Captain Leo Schneider, senior medical officer of the 194th, and Lieutenant Hickman, junior medic, set up an infirmary in the rear echelon as they now had a number who were sick. The inadequate amounts of medicine available only amplified the severity of what would have been very treatable afflictions.³³ During the first week of March 1942, soldiers began to be issued quarter rations.³⁴ Not long after this, General Douglas MacArthur left the Philippines and Major General Edward P. King Jr., was given command of Luzon.³⁵

The build up of Japanese troops was completed 2 weeks later. (Map 4) The stalemate continued until the final Japanese assault on 3 April 1942. Arrayed against I Corps from west to east, were the Japanese 65th Brigade, the 4th Division, and a regimental team from the 21st Division (Nagano Det).³⁶ The fighting began at 1500 hours with a massive barrage of indirect fire from over 150 artillery pieces and mortars, quickly backed up by tank and antitank gun direct fire. The artillery fire was so intense that much of the north face of Mount Samat became engulfed in an uncontrollable forest fire. Entire units were destroyed. American and Filipino soldiers, already weakened from malnourishment, simply had no energy to retreat.³⁷ The focus of the attack was the west flank of the II Corps sector.³⁸ As American artil-

Map 2.

The Fall of the Philippines, p. 267.

lery exposed itself by returning counter battery fire, highflying Japanese divebombers dropped their bombs, one by one, taking them out. Action occurred in the south as well. Company A, 194th Tank Battalion had received the on-order mission to defend the coastline and was in position that evening when several Japanese barges, armed with 75mm field guns, fired at the shoreline. Company A returned fire and the Japanese decided to retreat.³⁹

On 4 April, Miller was summoned to Tank Group Headquarters. Weaver detailed the plan that II Corps was preparing to counterattack and needed one tank company for support. Additionally, one company from the 192d Tank Battalion would replace Company A in their defend mission. Miller returned to battalion headquarters to conduct an abbreviated military decisionmaking process. Company C, followed by the battalion tactical command post (TAC), would head

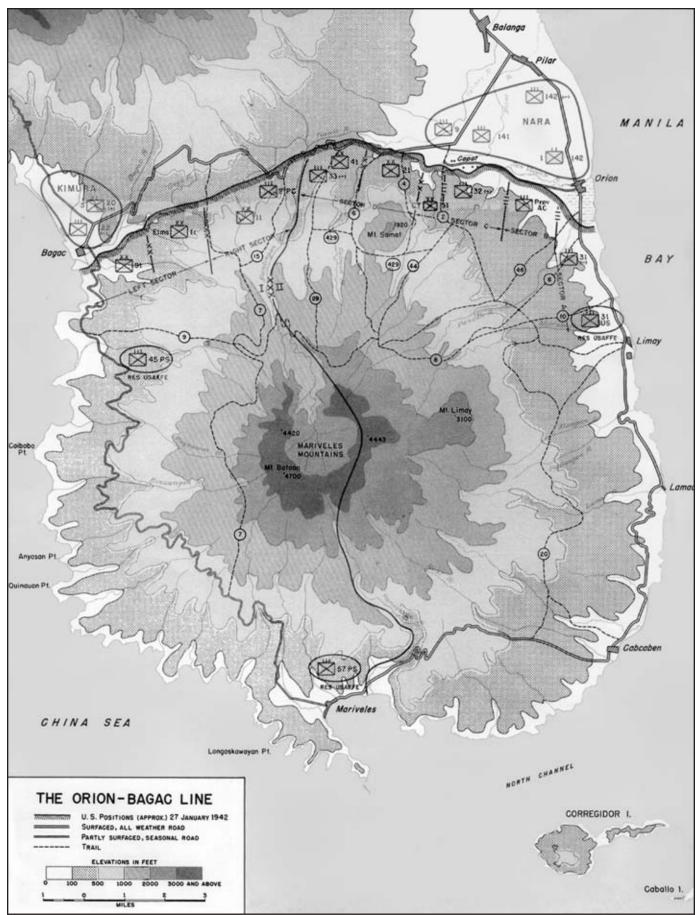
north. The TAC would be comprised of Miller and Captain Spoor, the S2, operating out of a jeep. Major L.E. Johnson, the S3, would take charge of the remaining combat units while Major Charles Canby, the XO, commanded the field trains.⁴⁰

After a wild ride up the narrow trail, Miller and the TAC located the Philippine division headquarters. The plan was for the 45th Infantry Regiment (on loan from I Corps) to attack north along Trail 29. They would flank the Japanese to the right, forcing a withdrawal. Company C would move its tanks on mountain trails to join the 45th Infantry in the attack. The plan was simple, but the men were worn out.

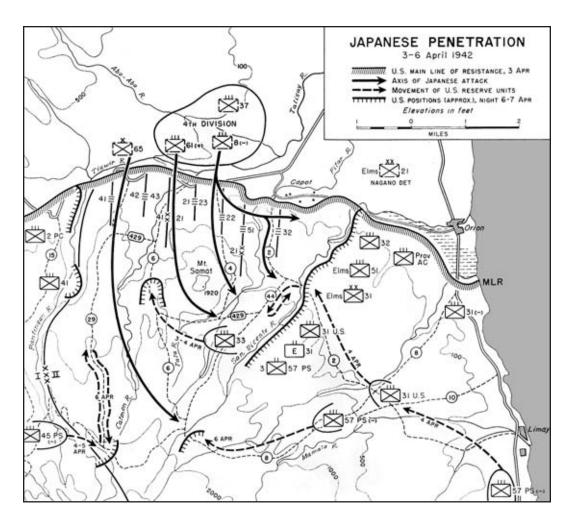
By 1600 hours on 6 April 1942, the TAC arrived at the south end of Trail 29. On arrival, they met Colonel Thomas W. Doyle, the commanding officer of the 45th Infantry. After much discussion and a reconnaissance, the TAC departed at 1900 hours to bring up Company C who was still occupying its tactical assembly area to the south.⁴¹

The trail to the south was jammed with confused traffic. Wounded soldiers were being evacuated, and broken down vehicles littered the battlefield creating massive traffic jams. The ride north would be even more harrowing. The battalion TAC led the way up the trail. At every turn it would find a wreck or obstacle that required evacuation from the route. Precious time was spent dismounting tanks and assessing the best way to deal with the wrecks. Company C tanks would push and pull the wrecks off the trail and then push and pull each other up and down the route.⁴²

Company C arrived at Trail 29 at 0610 hours that morning. They were 10 minutes late in supporting the attack. The 45th Infantry had just begun its movement to contact, allowing the tankers time to quickly catch up. Progress was slow as thick jungle met the trail on either side. The only place to maneuver the tanks was on the trail. This made Miller very uneasy. The infantry and armor advanced cautiously and did not make contact with the Japanese until 0900 hours. After a series of minor en-



Map 3. The Fall of the Philippines, p. 324.



gagements, Doyle became worried. It was now 1530 hours and his troops had lost contact with I Corps to his left and the troops to his right.⁴³ This suggested to Miller and Doyle that the enemy had infiltrated to the southeast of their area. What they did not know for certain is how far south.⁴⁴

As the two met, a report from Philippine scouts was received and described Japanese troops preparing defensive positions just a short distance to the north. Doyle mulled over several attack options. All his regiment had left for indirect fire was a single 81mm mortar with 10 rounds. Five of the 10 shells were fired expertly, bringing significant damage to the partially prepared Japanese positions. The 45th Infantry and Company C followed up with a short, hasty attack. The Japanese were so surprised that they abandoned their artillery, mortars, and rifles, running and screaming wildly into the jungle. As night approached, Miller and Spoor inspected the Japanese positions and discovered a well-prepared minefield located on Trail 29 next to the positions. The area had been seeded with the deadly model 93 mine that had brought Company C many casualties earlier in the campaign. Once again, luck and circumstance had intervened in their favor.⁴⁵

Later that evening, Miller and Lieutenant Colonel Wright, the 45th Infantry's XO, headed back 2 miles south to re-establish contact with the regimental field trains. The situation was desperate. After arriving at the field trains, Miller and Wright were quickly apprised of the enemy's situation. The Japanese main effort had indeed advanced to the east and south of their advance north. Thus, the Japanese had made a considerable penetration south all the way to the Philippine division headquarters. The division sent the 45th Infantry and Company C new orders. The two units would advance over the mountains to the east, arriving at the intersection of Trails 6 and 8. Here, they would set

Map 4.

The Fall of the Philippines, p. 423.

up defensive positions along a ridgeline north of Trail 8.46

The officers returned to their units and began their movement south along Trail 29. As they reached the intersection of Trails 29 and 8, Company C met the Philippine division commander, Brigadier General Maxon S. Lough. He informed Miller that he was aware of the original orders, but that his G2 had informed him that the area along Trail 8 was no longer under American or Philippine control.

The column of infantry and tanks cautiously began their movement along Trail 8. Miller and Lough organized an advanced guard for the 45th Infantry and Company C. In the lead was a squad of Phil-

ippine scouts, followed by two of Company C's M3 tanks. Miller, Wright, and Spoor trailed in a jeep. Movement occurred without incident for some 50 minutes until the advanced guard stopped for a 10-minute rest. Just as the tanks stopped, Miller's jeep accelerated and swung quickly to the right. As they halted, the scouts could be seen passing the first tank calling out, "Japs!"⁴⁷

The Japanese 65th Brigade had beaten them to the area. At that moment, a Japanese 75mm model 95 antitank gun opened fire. Leaves and branches fell to the ground as heavy machine gun fire cut a swath of destruction on the two lead tanks. Lieutenant Frank Riley, the tank commander, attempted to return fire only to receive a direct hit in the turret from an armor-piercing round from the model 95. Luck was on his side that day as the round sliced through the side of the turret, missing his head by inches. Blood ran through his shaking fingers from the small pieces of shrapnel that had been imbedded in his eyes and face. To Riley's rear, the scouts had re-established a hasty defense and, with Tommy guns blazing, returned a murderous covering fire. Miller and Spoor low crawled along the trail back to the scouts. Japanese bullets were striking the ground to their left and right, blowing rocks and sand into their skin.⁴⁸

The second tank escaped destruction by being in a hull-defilade position in a depression. Several accurate shots from the Japanese 75mm antitank gun succeeded in hitting the turret, though. Fortunately, the rounds bounced off harmlessly and the tank, along with Riley's crew, made good their retreat. The advanced guard consolidated and treated their casualties. Miller could see that smoke was pouring from his jeep. It had received a direct hit from the Japanese 75mm gun. Wright, who had occupied the rear seat, was never heard from again. The surviving M3 tank,

along with the scouts, began movement back to the main body of the 45th Infantry.⁴⁹

Vehicle movement was slow as their column neared physical and mental exhaustion. By 0800 hours on 7 April, they had made it back to their original start point, the intersection of Trails 8 and 29. Moffitt explained that life had not been boring for Company C. Earlier that morning, a column of Japanese model 89A tanks from the Japanese 7th Tank Regiment had attempted an attack from the north along Trail 29. Two were destroyed and the Japanese column beat a hasty retreat.⁵⁰

Lough sent orders for Company C tankers to secure the intersection at Trail 8 and 29. The 45th Infantry evacuated the immediate area and moved a short distance south. Miller then received orders from Tank Group Headquarters to return to his battalion. Miller let Doyle know his orders, asked him to take care of Company C, and departed. After a quick stop at Tank Group Headquarters, Miller and Spoor mounted a new jeep and headed south. The battalion field trains had been obliged to move south into a new position due to heavy Japanese artillery fire. Miller rolled into the new location at 0400 hours on 8 April. The trains had set up directly west of the town of Cabcaben.⁵¹

By this time, the defensive line was disintegrating. The Japanese 8th Infantry (4th Division) and the Nagano Det were bearing down hard on II Corps. The Japanese progressed from Limay to Lamao on 8 April alone.⁵² II Corps tasked the 194th Tank Battalion with supporting a new deliberate attack on the Japanese. Company D, commanded by Captain Jack Altman, was being readied when events began to surpass the II Corps staff's ability to assess and react.

Altman attempted to introduce his tanks against the Japanese by providing general support along the defensive line where they could. Company D's attack degenerated quickly. Artillery rained down on the company destroying several M3s. Tanks attempted to negotiate through the retreating traffic, but to little avail. As tanks tried to bypass wrecks, they became stuck in the swampy

To the south, Company A, 192d Tank Battalion and the entire 194th Tank Battalion were in defensive positions facing northeast along the coast, directly blocking the Japanese advance. Additional half-tracks were positioned along Trail 10, providing significant information to both the battalion and II Corps headquarters until the fighting ended. That morning, 8 April 1942, the Japanese assembled a motley collection of canoes, fishing boats, and small barges and attempted a half-hearted amphibious landing directly in front of their positions. The Japanese artillery also attempted to fire smoke into the two tank companies to provide obscuration against the tankers. Instead, the rounds fell just short, landed on the beaches, and added insurmountable confusion to the Japanese landing. The Japanese withdrew.⁵⁴

That afternoon, a battalion ammunition truck pulled up next to Company A, 194th Tank Battalion. Before the company could receive their ammunition, the roar of an approaching Japanese zero could be heard. Soldiers took cover as the fighter's machine guns tore apart the truck loaded with ammo. Shells exploded in all directions, causing the ground to shake and dirt to fly. No sooner than it had started, it was over. The driver of the truck stood up from the trench where he had taken cover and dusted himself off. He grinned out of his sun burnt, dirty face and said, "When they ask me where I was at the time of surrender, I can always say I was where the shells were the thickest."55

As the afternoon approached, orders were received from Tank Group Headquarters to have the battalion move further south. Companies A and D, 194th Tank Battalion, and Company A, 192d Tank Battalion, began movement. The trip was slow and arduous. Military police had to stop them several times as ammunition dumps were blown to prevent capture. That evening, the remaining tanks formed a defensive tactical assembly area and waited. The battalion commander's radio operator waited for the code word "blast" on the radio. This would be the signal to destroy all remaining equipment.⁵⁶

Around 0630 hours on 9 April 42, Company C returned to the battalion. At 0700 hours, "blast" was finally received. The tankers worked feverishly to destroy their equipment. One tank fired its remaining rounds into the other tanks and several trucks from the field trains. Gasoline was poured on every major item and lit. Food was evenly redistributed and the men prepared for the unknown.⁵⁷ That night, the men ate corn beef hash and peaches and thought of home. Few could imagine the horrors that awaited them on the death march and internment, but most just wrapped up in a blanket and went to sleep.58

The Philippines now began a brutal occupation that came to an end with the return of U.S. forces in October 1944. The lineage of the 194th Tank Battalion is perpetuated by the 1st and 2d Battalion, 194th Armor (Minnesota Army National Guard) and Company C, 1st Battalion, 149th Armor (California Army National Guard).



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Notes

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